



Dear Friend of Bryce Canyon National Park:

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Biological Assessment (BA) for a Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan. Utah prairie dogs (*Cynomys parvidens*) are a federally-threatened species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The EA is needed to evaluate potential impacts to the park, including natural, cultural and recreational resources and park operations from the proposed plan. The NPS is soliciting comments from the public to help identify issues associated with this stewardship plan and to develop alternatives to be evaluated in the EA.

The Stewardship Plan / EA will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) analyzes a reasonable range of alternatives to meet project objectives, 2) evaluates potential issues and impacts to park resources and values and 3) identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts. The BA will analyze impacts to Utah prairie dogs to comply with the ESA.

What is the purpose of the proposed Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan?

Utah prairie dogs have been a protected species under the ESA since 1973. The park is within the historic range for the Utah prairie dog and these animals were historically present in the park. Utah prairie dogs were reintroduced to Bryce Canyon National Park beginning in 1974 in an effort to return their presence as an important component of the park's wildlife community. Additionally, proactive management of federally-listed species by federal agencies is required under Section 7 of the ESA. Utah prairie dogs have been monitored and managed within the park since reintroductions restored active colonies during the 1970s. However, inadvertent impacts to Utah prairie dogs are occurring in the park as a result of visitor use and ongoing routine park operations.

Among the purposes of the proposed stewardship plan would be to:

- Maintain a sustainable population of Utah prairie dogs to foster their role as a keystone species in the environment.
- Identify ways to enhance prairie dog habitat within the park based on habitat suitability and connectivity with existing populations, while maintaining the diversity of native plant communities and facilitating park operations.
- Minimize/mitigate the effects of human activities in the park on Utah prairie dogs.
- Contribute to range-wide recovery and sustainability of Utah prairie dog populations.

What will the Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan address?

The NPS has identified some preliminary issues that would be analyzed through the EA process. Other issues and/or alternatives identified through this public scoping process would be added to these.

It is likely that the EA alternatives would identify options to:

- Maintain and/or establish Utah prairie dog habitat in several locations in the park to create, sustain or increase prairie dog colonies.
- Reduce exposure of Utah prairie dogs to artificial food sources.
- Identify sites within the park that could receive translocated Utah prairie dogs.
- Establish guidelines for managing park operations in Utah prairie dog habitat.

- Identify appropriate prairie dog exclusion methods to be used, where needed, to minimize conflicts among prairie dogs and park operations.

What is the purpose of public involvement?

Public involvement is required as part of the NEPA process both before a plan is written and when the plan is published. Public comments may be used to create preliminary alternatives, to modify those alternatives and to formulate a final plan. The NPS encourages written comments that offer new ideas, management options and/or alternatives. There will be three opportunities for public comment on the Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan: 1) now, during public scoping, 2) later, after preliminary alternatives are developed and 3) following publication of the EA / BA.

We are currently in the public scoping phase of this project. Please submit comments by **October 11, 2011** via the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>, via email to brca_information@nps.gov or by mail or hand delivery to the park: Bryce Canyon National Park Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan, P.O. Box 640201, Bryce, UT 84764. Commenters may respond to the questions presented below or submit their own comments. All comments submitted will be considered during preparation of the Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan / EA. We look forward to hearing from you!

- What issues should be addressed in the Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan?
- How should Bryce Canyon National Park manage Utah prairie dog populations and habitat within the park?
- How should Bryce Canyon National Park work with park neighbors (local communities, other federal and state agencies, tribal communities, etc.) to cooperate in Utah prairie dog conservation?
- What additional information, concerns or other comments do you have about the proposed stewardship plan?

Thank you for your interest in Bryce Canyon National Park and your participation in the development of the Utah Prairie Dog Stewardship Plan. If you have questions, please contact Sarah Haas, Biologist, Bryce Canyon National Park at (435) 834-4753.

Please be aware that names and addresses of respondents may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. The NPS practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. **If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment.** We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

**IF YOU WISH TO BE REMOVED FROM THE
BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK GENERAL MAILING LIST
FOR PROJECT SCOPING PLEASE CONTACT SARAH HAAS
(sarah_haas@nps.gov 435-834-4753)**